



Strawberry Seeds and Love Potions

By catharrington



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Summary:

July 4th left them all a little shaky. A little broken. A lot scarred. Billy survived the Mind Flayer, they all did. And now he's recovered for the better. Became someone that Steve can see himself with. Really sees himself with. More than friendship, he means. But he can't bring himself to do it. To admit how he feels to a guy who's already been weighed down with so much. Good thing, though, Robins got just the answer. Or rather, just the perfectly brewed potion.

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Author's Note:



Originally posted to Tumblr for Harringrove Week of Love day 2: mystical creatures!

This story includes a wing-woman Robin who is a practicing witch, and Billy / Steve as two pining in love friends who just needs that extra magical push. Even if by accident ☐ thanks for reading!

The coffee mug clicked onto the table with an otherworldly menace. Steve's brown eyes darted to it, then back up to Robin. He furrowed his brows in a question. But before he could open his mouth, she held up her hand.

"It's not poison," she explained.

"Could have fooled me, Robs," Steve hissed.

"It's called a potion, dingus. It's going to help!" She pushed the cup farther down the bar. The diner around them was mostly closed, and Robin was the only waitress in the place. Her peach colored apron brought out the green of her wide, devious eyes.

"Potion... poison... that's like one letter different," Steve leaned back in his stool away from the mug.

"Wow, so you know how to spell. What other skills will you showcase, The Amazing Harrington?" Robin's lips curled up in an evil

grin, leaning her body over the bar to dig the insult farther.

Steve just scoffed. Putting his elbow up on the bar and shielding himself as he tried to get back to the open College text book he was supposed to be reading. All the words were rushing together in swirls of black and white. He pushed his thumb into his curved bottom lip to try and force himself to focus, chewed on the pad of it, but he could swear the mug was mocking him.

Could swear he could smell that strawberry pink liquid Robin had poured for him when he ordered a simple black coffee.

“Drink it,” Robin snapped.

“No,” Steve growled.

“Are you going to grow a backbone and actually confess then?” She quirked one brow up.

Her face was so condescending. So smug. Steve hated how much he knew that look, how it made him sort of fond for her.

“I mean,” he sighed. His walls crumbling in defeat. His fingers coming up to join in worrying his bottom lip. “I mean I might?”

“It’s been a year Steve. A year of following him around like a little stray kitten! A year of ‘Oh Billy, I’ll give you a ride!’ ‘Oh Billy, how was physical therapy?’ ‘Oh Billy, pay attention to me!’—“

“I get it, I get it!” Steve turned towards her again to motion with his hand to keep it down. Waving his wide palm around until Robin’s pursed face cracked into a giggle. “Just keep it down, would you?”

And he turns over his shoulder to survey the empty diner before he’s got enough courage to look at her again.

“Yeah, okay. I’ve got a fat, stupid crush on Billy. And I know that I’m the most embarrassing and dumb guy you know. But...,” he trails off. Eyes wandering back down to the coffee cup. “It’s not the same as Nancy Wheeler or even Tammy Thompson. So much can— no, so much has gone wrong. If I... confessed right now, It would just make everything too much for him.”

His fingers nervously tick across the mint green bar. Wishing like hell he could cross them in front of his chest and make a barrier.

Robin takes a step forward. Her own fingers an inch away from his. She twitches like she can't make up her mind if she wants to grab them. Like someone worrying their bottom lip if they are going to pick the last slice of pie in the diner's glass container. But she does, reaching out to lay her skinny fingers and their chipping black nail polish over his own.

"Dingus," she starts lovingly, "you don't know any of that."

Steve scoffs, rolls his eyes like he's going to turn away, but Robin holds his hand tightly.

"You don't know if it's too much for him, or what he wants. And you don't," Robin took a second before continuing, her breath hitching, "you don't know what's going to happen tomorrow."

Hawkins, Indiana is the poster town for unknown tomorrow's. Steve knows way too well about that. The tunnels crawling with slime and vines that play host to the monsters of the world.

But Billy, he surely knows better than anyone. It's been a whole year but no one's going to ever forget what he did. What happened to him under the control of a creature called The Mind Flayer. How Billy used himself like a human shield and died to try to make up for it. Just to come back with an electric jolt to his tattered heart.

They had to stitch new lungs inside his chest. He called himself Zombie Boy now. Called the patchwork scars heavy metal.

Steve just smiled. Nodded his head as he watched Billy climb out the crumbled wreckage of his shell. Climb out a new man, a man Steve caught himself falling head over heels for.

"You're right, Robs," Steve exhales.

"Oh, what was that?" Robin giggled, leaning in to hear better.

Steve pushed her away by their joint hands. Wiggling his fingers afterwards as if cursed.

His breath quipped and held tight in his chest as he turned back to the coffee mug. It sat waiting for him. The light red liquid swimming with foam and black seeds at the top. As if no matter how long it sat, it was always freshly prepared.

Steve gripped the handle of the white mug hard. Thought about how quick Billy's body hit the ground when he died. How quick it all felt to Steve who had to helplessly stand back and watch it all.

He lifted the mug to his lips and drank in desperate, greedy gulps.

And as he finished it and slammed the ceramic back down on the bar, he didn't immediately feel different. His mouth felt strange, the red juice had a powdery after-taste and much more seeds than his gag reflex was expecting. But as he screwed up his face from the flavor, he didn't feel changed. Or empowered. Or whatever Robin was trying out with this magic spell.

"I don't—," Steve started, but his voice stopped just as it started. His head pounded like a drum was beating right next to his ears.

Doubling over in his stool, he gripped at the sides of his head in a panic. His whole skull felt like it was vibrating. Shifting around even, his scalp moving at the top of his head as if something were to burst out.

Steve grabbed two fist fulls of his hair and groaned through the wave of pain. Burying his chin in his chest to try and stop the noises before they came.

And with the same quickness, the same red hot poker-searing pain that dug into his skull, his spine felt it. From the top of his head, along his back, then down to his jeans he felt a molten lava. Waves and waves of heat as if his bones were being stretched inside his skin.

It was so painful, but somehow only lasted a second.

As sudden as it came, he felt fine again.

Steve jerked his head up to scream at Robin , when he noticed her eyes wandering to the top of his head.

He followed them with hesitant fingers, slowly running up his now

messy head of quaffed brown locks under his fingertips brushed something new.

Giving an undignified yelp, he drew his hand backwards as if burnt. His eyes were wide and pleading with Robin. But she watched him right back with the same face. As if she didn't make this, as if it wasn't her poison potion that created this.

Steve timidly touched the new addition to his head again. This time he didn't flinch as his fingertips sank into hair that felt soft as fur. Following it up to a point, and then feeling as it curved inwards to softer peach fuzz.

He could feel something, as his fingers moved, he could feel them as easily as if he were touching the lobes of his ears.

Because he was touching his ears.

A quick glance to the dingy mirror hanging behind the bar confirmed it for him. There was a pretty pair of brown cat ears sprung from the top of his head.

"Robin," he breathed. Unable to fully grasp how he felt. "What was that drink exactly?"

She blinked at him, gathering her thoughts before she cleared her throat. "It's um, it's supposed to be a charm. An aid, like-like an enhancer. It said it would bring out the traits that the person you craft the potion for desires the most."

Then she stopped to laugh, her red lips caught between gaping open or turning up on the corners in a mocking laugh. "I didn't— wow! I thought worst case scenario would be you'll turn into an asshole like you were in high school. B-But this?"

Steve looked from her back to the mirror. Wrapping one hand around the pointed triangle of his ear. Pushing it down just to watch it perk back up again.

Below where he could see the mirror, he felt a weight along his back. A ghost of the pain from the transformation, now just a warm heaviness. And he could feel that heaviness twitch at the same time

his ears did. He could feel the newness move along the chair behind him.

Steve almost didn't want to, but he glanced down from his new ears. And, as if it knew it was being seen by its new owner, his chocolate colored furry tail flicked towards him.

"I'm... I'm a cat boy?" Steve stutters out a gasping breath.

"Well, more like a cat man, really," Robin tries to help. "Come on, you're almost old enough to buy beer."

"Really helpful, Robs, thanks so much for the curse and now the insults!" He shouts.

Holding up her hands in defense, her smile doesn't drop. Even in her shoulders Steve can see she's quivering with laughter.

He reaches back up to feel along the base of his new ears. How the fur is the same color and melts almost perfectly into his own silky hair. How it feels good, actually, to scratch his blunt nails there just like how a house cat would enjoy it.

"This isn't some trait. Or some, something that Billy would find attractive in me." Steve groans. "This is some freaky kink!"

Robin finally clasps her hand over her mouth to dam up the waterfall of laughter. It hits against her palm in a muffled, annoying, cruel noise. She shakes her head as if she wanted to argue but couldn't get past how funny she found it.

"You must have mixed up the wrong stuff, Robin! Put the wrong magical thing in the mixture!" Steve tried to shake his head out to unstick his thoughts.

He runs his hands through his hair as he does when he gets flustered, and now his cat ears bend with the motion so they don't get tugged on. Folding neatly onto his head before bouncing back up to attention. It felt so weird, but somehow it didn't feel very different at all. They acted as if they've always been there.

"Yeah, okay, that's it," Steve nodded to himself. "You gave me the

wrong potion. It's okay, it happens! Just whip up a new one that's for reversing cat ears. That's in your witch book right?"

Robin kept her hand over her mouth and kept shaking her head. She wasn't replying to anything Steve said. And it was honestly making him more mad than the new ears on top of his head.

"Hey, is it really funny enough for all that?" he mused.

Then Steve looked back up at the mirror. He turned his head side to side to admire the way his ears moved with him. How they were his hair color on the outside then a flushed pink in the very middle. How there were strands of lighter brown between that and those reminded him of how highlighted his hair gets in the summer sun.

"I don't know. I think they... I think they sort of suit me?" He shrugged.

Robin dropped her hands and her laughter was louder without it, but she managed to catch her breath to finally reply. "Oh, they suit you alright. You're a natural at this stuff, Garfield."

Steve furrowed his eye brows. Cat ears folding down on his head in defense. Cat tail hitting against the chair with a solid thunk. "I'm not orange," he hissed back.

Robin opened her mouth with likely more insults and no actual help from the aspiring witch who caused all this mess, when she was interrupted. The bell above the entrance letting out a loud ding.

The front door, painted in matching mint green like the bar, swung open. And like he was summoned, like his ears were simply ringing so much from being talked about he hunted down the source, in walked Billy.

He was wearing a grey hoodie. One of many that he collected once he got discharged out of his hospital. This one Steve was familiar with, because it was his. Handed down with a coat and a couple other winter items as Steve feigned indifference over concern about Billy's California blood staying warm. An old Hawkins High baseball league logo sitting right in the middle. It's fading green and orange

design still bright enough to make Steve's breath catch in his throat.

"Hey, Harrington," Billy greeted. He lifted his big, scarred hand to wipe the hood down from his head. Letting loose the wild mess of short curls that are regrowing on his head. After they had to buzz it all off. After he came back to life.

"Hey, Billy," Steve croaked out. His voice was awkward. His face, he knew, must be blushing bright red.

He turned to seek help from Robin, but the swinging door that lead into the kitchen was rocking back and forth on its hinges. She must have run away as soon as Billy came in. And Steve was too busy watching his entrance to even notice.

Cursing under his breath, Steve racked his brain with an excuse. Some logical way to explain why he had sprouted two new fluffy ears off his head.

He felt like he was playing a pinball machine in his head. Flashing lights and jingling noises were going off. But nothing was coming to him. He couldn't find any words to offer at all to Billy.

So he whipped his head to the side, watched as Billy stopped glancing around the empty diner to finally settle on Steve.

And he watches as Billy's gorgeous, totally unfair pretty blue eyes lift to see the cat ears on his head.

"Woah, Harrington," Billy exhales like he's blowing a mouth full of cigarette smoke. "That's really—,"

"I know, Billy, okay! It's um, um?" Steve waves his hands around as if that can turn the wheels of his thinking some more. But he can't think. Not well anyway, when Billy's standing here looking so handsome, so warm, and so alive right in front of him.

"Yeah, okay, I can totally explain this—,"

Billy cuts him off with a soft chuckle. Just under his breath. Steve closes his mouth quick enough to make his teeth click.

"I don't know, Steve. Ya don't have to explain it. It's kinda cute,

actually,” Billy drawls out his words low and soft. And then smiles at him.

A second ticks by. Billy’s boots skid on the tile as he steps even closer. All the way until he’s right next to Steve. Grabbing the back of a stool right next to him.

And Billy hasn’t taken his eyes off Steve’s ears once. And he’s got a little sparkle in them like the first time Billy got a point over him during basket ball practice back in high school.

And oh, *oh*.

“Cute?” Steve parrots back.

“Yeah, super cute,” Billy confesses.